

Dear Moz

Thank you for your recent letter to the Jersey Opera House Ltd Board (JOHL) with respect to the funding for the Government Plan 2024-2027.

I thought it would be useful to highlight the governance structure surrounding the building and the refurbishment project.

The Jersey Opera House building is a Government owned building sat as an asset within the Jersey Property Holdings (JPH) portfolio. The building is operated by the charity JOHL, A full performance programme was delivered by the operator until closure in March 2020. The charity has remained the building operator since, despite closure to the public.

The revenue funding for the building and its capital refurbishment and maintenance sits within the Government of Jersey's Department of the Economy (DoE) budget. That department is the client, not JOHL.

There is no formal relationship between the operating entity (JOHL) and the Government of Jersey - either through JPH or the DoE team - for the property. The operating entity receives an annual revenue grant from the DoE team to operate the theatre against a pre-described set of objectives. The target operating model between the Government and JOHL is currently being reviewed (prior to opening) which will include the lease arrangements for the building from the JPH to JOHL.

For the refurbishment project

- the budget holder is the DoE
- The project is being facilitated by JPH
- JOHL is the end-user with no budgetary or decision - making responsibility for the project. Representatives from JOHL sit on the Project Board alongside JPH and DoE Government representatives to advise on the project operationally.
- The JOHL team are currently not resident within the Jersey Opera House building as it is now under the control of the appointed Construction Company, Ashbe. The Opera House team of 4 (currently), who are employed by JOHL, are now working out of the Property & Infrastructure offices at La Collette with the JOHL staging, lighting, and sound equipment in storage at Fort Regent.

With regards the amounts being budgeted this responsibility sits entirely with the DoE team.

Therefore, we would answer the three questions as follows:

1. **Is the proposed funding sufficient to complete the project?** The re-opening of the Jersey Opera House is in fact a number of separate projects rolled into one public facing exercise, cumulating in the first show which goes ahead there. This includes:
 1. The building works covered under the refurbishment – covered by this response.
 1. As stated above, JOHL operate within a project board framework including the DoE team and JPH, however budgetary responsibility for the project sits outside the JOHL team, as we are the end-user not the client. As of the submission date (10th November) the full costing exercise has not been completed, which is being controlled by DoE & JPH and managed with an external property agency (Colin Smith Partnership).
 2. The re-building of the operational team – not covered by this response
 3. Updating & renewing the technical equipment – not covered by this response
 4. Programming for future events – not covered by this response

5. The customer experience – not covered by this response
6. The long-term operating model for JOHL – not covered by this response
2. **Is the project due to be completed during 2025?** As above this is a question for the DoE and JPH team. The current project plan would have the building returned to JOHL in late 2024 with performances commencing from late spring 2025. Performances are generally booked (at least) 12 months in advance with potential cancellation fees therefore on a balance of risk we would have a lag between handing over of the theatre back to the operating team and performances recommencing. A confirmed completion and handover date is required in order for a programme to be properly put in place. The current project plan has not been finalised yet, and with an historic building being renovated there will always be a risk of slippage on times.

3) **How have the cost estimates for the project been assessed and reviewed regarding best value for money?** As with the above questions this will need to be answered from the Government teams - JPH and DOE.

With regards the other two questions the Board of JOHL would support any investment in the Visitor Economy, as a large amount of our customers purchase tickets whilst visiting the island. When the Opera House reopens, we are keen to work closer with hotels and Visit Jersey to understand our position within the eco-system. With a closer relationship we can tailor performances to coincide with promotions the hospitality and visitor economy are undertaking. We have seen with recent productions such as the Floating Earth and the Dreaming Trees, and with existing events such as Weekender that events can drive large numbers of people to the island alongside the many residents that also enjoy the experiences.

Before it's closure in 2020 the Opera House was on the start of its digital journey - however much has moved on during the time since then and when we reopen, we will be looking to invest in the latest ticketing and digital technology to enable a much smoother customer experience. However, as with a number of different sectors a proportion of our customers are not digital adopters, and we will need to ensure that this group are also catered for within the operation.

The JOHL Board is not involved in the Elite Sport strategies apart from noting the fact that a varied and balanced provision of arts, culture, heritage, and sport are required to support an active and engaged population. The benefits for the mental and physical health of the island are well documented when it comes to these sectors, and we would support any investment in the Government plan to achieve this. Whilst we have no specific data to support this the amounts of money currently leaving the island for people to get their fix of entertainment is anecdotally significant and we should be providing more locally to keep this money on island. It is regularly quoted that there is "little to do" on Jersey and collectively we should be looking to change this by supporting the areas listed in the topic. It is become very evident since March 2020 and closure, just how missed the Opera House has been by residents and visitors. We are firmly of the belief that a refurbished building coupled with a sensible level of ongoing government revenue and capital to maintain the building will allow the Opera House and the professional operators (JOHL) to fill this void.

As regards funding for Arts Heritage and Culture we are fortunate to have secured the 1% of budget to support the provision. We do recognize this is a large step forward from previous budgets however, as with any arts-based organisation, we would always welcome improved revenue and capital funding – in particular, we look to gain a three-year operating budget, rather than the annual process as current. Quite simply with more, we can do more and benefit more of the community.

It is essential within this funding though to ensure as much of it as possible goes into artistic production rather than central administration or property maintenance. Jersey has made some great strides in the last 24 months from which the island's cultural scene can thrive. There is now a base, a platform if you like, and desire within government and the island's communities to become a leader in this area. Now is the opportunity to grasp it.

Hopefully, the above answers your questions.

Kind Regards

Dave Chalk

Chair, Jersey Opera House Ltd